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ABSTRACT

LENs (Learning Exchange Networks) modules and seminars are a series of self-directed learning resources that are written by and for faculty. The intent of the modules and seminars is to enhance faculty learning in the fundamentals of curriculum design and adult learning. The original LENs program was developed at Humber College, Toronto, Ontario, in the early 1990s. At Humber's request, the League for Innovation in the Community College became involved in a project to update and further develop the LENs modules and to make the programs available to community colleges throughout North America and the world. The project enlisted colleges from the League Board and the League's Learning Initiative Projects to participate in piloting the materials and evaluating impact. The modules, composed of three to five units each, include general learning outcomes and specific competencies, in-depth discussion, self tests, and opportunities for the reader to reflect on individual professional practices. The basic reading resource is a series of six modules ranging from Creating a Positive Learning Environment to Instructional Evaluation/Summative Strategies. The institutional impact of LENs on new faculty orientation at the Dallas Community College District (Texas) includes over 150 new faculty trained using LENs modules, with very positive responses to the program reported. (NB)

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LENs: The Learning Exchange Networks

Humber College
Toronto, Ontario

LENs modules and seminars are a series of self-directed learning resources that were written by and for faculty. The intent of the modules and the seminars is to enhance the learning of faculty in the fundamentals of curriculum design and adult learning.

The original LENs program was developed at Humber College in the early 1990s. At Humber's request, the League for Innovation in the Community College became involved in a project to update and further develop the LENs modules and to make the program available to community colleges in North America and around the world.

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The LENs Faculty Development Program, consisting of seven modules, addresses topics and skills essential for quality teaching and learning. In addition to the seminar and module package, extensive workshop materials are available in both print and electronic forms to support a wide variety of training options. The LENs Faculty Development Program has many audiences and supports many contexts, including

- New faculty training,
- Adjunct faculty training and certification,
- Program or department training initiatives,
- Graduate courses in teaching in the community college,
- Faculty training based on feedback and performance review, and
- Continuing education programs for corporate trainers.

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Recognizing the patterns, experiences, and cycles of teaching and learning, the LENs modules are ideal for new training programs or, to refresh and engage more seasoned faculty and mature professional development programs.

Project Description

The modules, composed of three to five units each, include general learning outcomes and specific competencies, in-depth discussion, self-tests, and opportunities for the reader to reflect on individual professional practices.

The style of presentation features numerous graphics and bulleted lists, concrete and specific examples, and a positive, encouraging tone. Wherever possible, opportunities for instructional innovation are explored and background information is kept to a minimum. Because teachers both enjoy and benefit from collaboration with their peers, each module is designed to prepare the reader to participate in one or more follow-up workshops (optional) for which extensive training activities and materials have been developed.

The Modules

The basic reading resource of the LENs program is a series of six modules, designed to be used individually or as part of a continuing professional development program. Although the module numbers suggest a sequence, each can be studied on its own and in any order. Because the modules are flexible, they can be used selectively and independently, leaving integration and implementation strategies to creative development. The six topics include

1. Creating a Positive Learning Environment;
2. Developing Learning Outcomes and Competencies;
3. Selecting Teaching and Learning Strategies;
4. Enhancing Teaching and Learning Using Educational Technology;

5. Classroom Assessment-Formative Strategies; and

6. Instructional Evaluation-Summative Strategies.

The modules, organized in short units, attempt to reduce reading time for busy professionals. Characteristically breezy in style, the units make extensive use of bulleted lists and graphics for clarity and brevity. In some cases, the writing is very detailed, for example, Module 2, Developing Learning Outcomes and Competencies includes predefined competencies and suggested field research activities. While other modules provide an adequate overview but avoid in-depth development, e.g. Module 1, Creating a Positive Learning Environment and Module 3, Selecting Teaching and Learning Strategies. On the other hand, Module 4, Enhancing Teaching and Learning Using Educational Technologies details strategies useful to teachers and students but goes beyond the skills educators might learn by reading the software manual or by taking a campus technical training course.

The format of each LENs module includes a rich review of content, incorporating self-study guides, training workshop strategies, units of instruction with noted competencies, suggested outcomes, student and learner expectations, revelations on the use of humor in learning environments, and personal reflection opportunities and self-testing components. As with most resources, there is room for a favorite article or short book, and each LENs module includes a list of possibilities in the bibliography section.

Campus Facilitator Training Seminars

Through years of implementation and refinement, the LENs project has undergone varying degrees of change and revision, but the original design implemented by Humber College remains unchanged. A pilot project involving implementation at Johnson County Community College and the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) resulted in the

development of training materials for on-campus workshops and Campus Facilitator Training Seminars. An extensive LENs Workshop Resource Kit, which includes hundreds of handouts and transparencies, suggested strategies for workshop sessions, and a variety of workshop formats, allows each campus or organization to develop a program responsive to its needs. The materials are also available in an electronic format, allowing for the revision and customization of handouts, transparencies, and the creation of customized media.

The LENs Workshop Resource Kits contains ready-made assignment sheets and guides for workshop members to support a variety of activities. The philosophy behind much of the LENs development tools is that talking about teaching is not the same as doing it and/or feeling it, with the same being true of learning. Within specific modules there are recommendations for each participant to conduct short lessons of 20 to 30 minutes to demonstrate a teaching technique integrated with some aspect of discipline content. Not only is this simulated experience enjoyable-new voices leading the workshop and new and interesting content from a variety of content areas-but the more macro benefits include collegiality, as participants come to recognize and admire diverse teaching personalities; also, teaching simulations provide a realistic experience for learning. How, indeed, do our students feel? What happens to learners when teachers facilitate a colorful mixture of learning events? The teaching simulation is far more than a demonstration of technique; the goal is to lead participants closer to the learner experience!

The LENs Project Results

It does not take a large staff to implement a recognizable learning impact with the LENs Faculty Development Program. The LENs materials, tools, and activities are used by noted pilot participants when planning workshops, seminars, or many other learning opportunities for college staff, faculty - new, part-time, adjunct - and college and university program students.

During planning phases, facilitators look to the LENs materials for samples, suggestions, and support documentation.

Pilot participants claim, "One way to really get it to infuse is to get experienced people to work with you in the planning and implementation phases." This captures their learning and expertise and generates enthusiasm among informal leaders and colleagues.

At Humber College, LENs materials are currently being used in the following programs:

- New full-time faculty orientation program
- Part-time Continuing Education Teaching Clinic (designed for orientation of new Humber Continuing Education Faculty)
- Divisional or program learning opportunities in curriculum development or review
- Onsite degree completion programs (for B.A. and M.A. in education)
- Part-time teacher mini conferences (designed for short seminar courses with part-time faculty)
- Teaching Effectiveness Program (a five-course program of certification for dealing with adult learners)

At Humber, it is difficult to determine the exact number of faculty engaged with the LENs Program over the last 10 years. Over the last eight years, every faculty member hired has been introduced to LENs, or approximately 150-160 individuals, hundreds of part-time faculty, and about 100 education degree completion participants. This said, there are several more who have been reminded of the LENs materials in the ongoing workshops and learning seminars sponsored and supported by Humber College over the decade.

LENs is always perceived as an excellent resource, but the most significant and valuable elements of the LENs experience are the seminars aligned to the process, with a strategic opportunity to engage in dialogue with colleagues. The development of this community of learners is one of the most notable parts of the LENs program and a pivotal result of the interactive, engaging, and reflective materials and activities embedded within the LENs tools.

Humber includes the ongoing and constant request for documents through the LENs

Website as an indicator of success and, due to demand, has stopped printing LENs materials in a paper version.

As a pilot project, The Dallas County Community College District has recognized a significant impact with the LENs Program. Like most community colleges across the country, DCCCD is experiencing great transition among the faculty ranks. After two decades of relatively low turnover, more new DCCCD faculty have been added in the past 2 years than in the past 25 years. In response to this wave of change and as part of its investment in the community's future, DCCCD has implemented a new faculty orientation with LENs materials. The design of the new initiative is to welcome new faculty members to the DCCCD culture and offer them support as they begin their DCCCD careers.

The institutional impact of LENs on new faculty orientation at DCCCD to date includes

- New full-time faculty orientation program;
- Over 150 new faculty trained using LENs modules;
- Support and participation from the all leaders of the DCCCD Faculty Association;
- Training and certification of 9 DCCCD LENs facilitators;
- A full-series of services, resources, workshops, and retreats in support of faculty development.

Through survey evaluation, faculty participants have reported "very positive" responses to the LENs materials, and attendance continues to grow at faculty development seminars.

Future Project Developments

The multiplicity of teaching topics and learning strategies of the LENs Program is available for online review. However, the core of LENs principles is not in the presentation format or the idea of workshops merely becoming an impressive series of guest presenters. The essence of LENs success with faculty is in the cohort collegiality and continuity of a community of learners.

Beyond the pilot programs at Humber College, DCCCD, and Johnson County Community College, new versions and module updates will be produced and implemented nationally at selected community colleges. Evaluative and formative feedback will guide creative development of LENs materials that fit in form and function the ever-changing needs of a learning community. Opportunities to preview LENs and participate in facilitator training sessions are scheduled in conjunction with League conferences and seminars. For 2003, a one-day learning course will be hosted at Innovations 2003, and a three-day training session will be hosted June15-18 at Humber College in Toronto.

Summary and Lessons Learned

As faculty development continues to be a pressing need among community colleges, investments in securing and supporting high-quality and committed faculty are being recognized beyond discipline demands and are growing as economic issues. These investments begin with time and effort in meaningful activities that capture the imagination and support innovation. The LENs program provides meaning and mission beyond professional development, and, like good faculty, aspires to touch the pulse of learning.

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